



## Office of the U.S. Surgeon General

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### **News Release**

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### **SURGEON GENERAL RELEASES FIRST COMPREHENSIVE FRAMEWORK TO INCREASE BREASTFEEDING RATES AND PROMOTE OPTIMAL BREASTFEEDING PRACTICES**

*Washington, October 30, 2000*—Recognizing the considerable scientific evidence that states breastfeeding is one of the most important contributors to infant health, the Office of the U.S. Surgeon General today released the first comprehensive national framework to promote breastfeeding and optimal breastfeeding practices. The *HHS Blueprint for Action on Breastfeeding* was developed by health and scientific experts from 14 federal agencies and 23 health care professional organizations, including the American Academy of Pediatrics and the American Academy of Family Physicians.

During the past 15 years, the Office of the Surgeon General has highlighted the public health importance of breastfeeding through numerous workshops and publications. Scientific evidence suggests that breastfeeding provides a range of benefits for an infant's growth, immunity and development. In addition, breastfeeding has also been shown to improve maternal health.

The *Blueprint for Action* released today promotes a plan for breastfeeding based on education, training, awareness, support and research. Specifically, the plan lays out a framework based on the recommendation that infants be exclusively breastfed during the first four to six months of life, preferably for a full six months. The plan also suggests that, ideally, breastfeeding should continue through the first year of life.

Despite the many benefits of breastfeeding, statistics reveal that 64 percent of American mothers breastfeed in the early postpartum period, with only 29 percent still breastfeeding six months after birth. Racial and ethnic disparities in breastfeeding are wide, revealing extremely low rates among African-American women. In 1998, 45 percent of African-American mothers breastfed their infants in the early postpartum period; 66 percent of Hispanic mothers and 68

percent of white mothers breastfed. Only 19 percent of African-American mothers were still breastfeeding at six months, compared to 28 percent of Hispanic mothers and 31 percent of white mothers. That same year, 54 percent of low-income Asian and Pacific Islander children and 59 percent of American Indian and Alaska Native children were ever breastfed.

“Low breastfeeding rates documented in the *Blueprint for Action* are a serious public health challenge, particularly in certain minority communities,” said David Satcher, M.D., U.S. Surgeon General and Assistant Secretary for Health. “With scientific evidence indicating that breastfeeding can play an important role in an infant’s health, the time has come for us to work together to promote optimal breastfeeding practices. Each of us, at all levels of the public and private sectors, must now turn these recommendations into programs that best suit the needs of our own communities.”

Healthy People 2010, the nation’s health agenda for the next decade, has set an objective to increase the proportion of all mothers who breastfeed in the early postpartum period to 75 percent. “The Healthy People objectives will be realized only when we work together to put in place culturally appropriate strategies to promote breastfeeding, with particular emphasis on education and support from health care professionals, employers and family members, especially fathers and grandmothers,” said Wanda Jones, Dr.P.H., Deputy Assistant Secretary for Health (Women’s Health) and director of the Office on Women’s Health.

The *Blueprint* offers action steps for the health care system, families, the community, researchers and the workplace, to better focus attention on the importance of breastfeeding. It recommends that health care professionals who provide maternal and child care are trained on the basics of lactation and breastfeeding counseling; that women who return to work after childbirth should have access to childcare facilities or private rooms on-site to accommodate breastfeeding; that social support and information resources be established for women such as hotlines and peer counseling; and that research be conducted on issues surrounding breastfeeding.

Scientific evidence states that human milk contains an abundance of factors that are active against infection. Breastfed infants, compared with formula-fed infants, produce enhanced immune responses to polio, tetanus, diphtheria, and common respiratory infections. Recent research also suggests that breastfeeding reduces the risk of chronic diseases among children, including diabetes, inflammatory bowel disease, allergies and asthma, and childhood cancer.

Mothers also benefit from breastfeeding, including less postpartum bleeding, earlier return to pre-pregnancy weight, a possible reduced risk of ovarian cancer and premenopausal breast cancer, and positive hormonal, physical and psychosocial effects. The *Blueprint* recommends that mothers with certain conditions, including Hepatitis C, substance abuse problems, some environmental exposures, metabolic disorders and breast implants should check with their doctor before breastfeeding. Women with HIV/AIDS and human T-cell leukemia virus type 1 (HTLV-1) should not breastfeed.

The *Blueprint* was developed by the Subcommittee on Breastfeeding, under the auspices of the HHS Environmental Health Policy Committee, including members of the Federal Interagency

Working Group on Women's Health and the Environment, coordinated by the Office on Women's Health.

The full text of the HHS *Blueprint for Action on Breastfeeding* can be found on a new specialty section on breastfeeding on the Web site of the National Women's Health Information Center ([www.4woman.gov](http://www.4woman.gov)) or through its toll-free telephone service at 1-800-994WOMAN (TDD: 1-888-220-5446). For a brief look at some of the many programs and services currently promoting and supporting breastfeeding within health care, work sites, and communities nationwide, visit the Web site developed by the Division of Nutrition and Physical Activity, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at <http://cdc.gov/breastfeeding>.

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Agencies that collaborated to develop *HHS Blueprint for Action on Breastfeeding* include the Administration for Children and Families, Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Environmental Protection Agency, Food and Drug Administration, Health Resources and Services Administration, Indian Health Service, National Institutes of Health, Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Office of HIV/AIDS Policy, Office of Planning and Evaluation, the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the U.S. Agency for International Development. From the private sector; American Academy of Family Physicians, American Academy of Pediatrics, American Association of Health Plans, American College of Nurse-Midwives, American Hospital Association, American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, American Nurses Association, Black Women's Health project, Morgan State University, National Black Nurses Association, National Conference of State Legislatures, National Medical Association, Washington Business Group on Health, Washington state Department of Health, the United States Breastfeeding Committee, and the University of Rochester School of Medicine.